



2009

THE IMPLICATAIONS OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL ON HISTORIC AMERICAN CATHOLIC ARCHITECTURE

Jenna Victoria Farah
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A THESIS In Historic Preservation Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of MASTER OF SCIENCE IN HISTORIC PRESERVATION 2009

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Disciplines

Historic Preservation and Conservation

Comments

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2009

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COUNCIL ON HISTORIC AMERICAN CATHOLIC
ARCHITECTURE

Jenna Victoria Farah

A THESIS

In

Historic Preservation

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Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN HISTORIC PRESERVATION

2009

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For Anthony and Aidan.

I could never write enough words to tell you how much I love you.
I couldn't do this without either of you.

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INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Church in America has complicated history due partly to the fundamental belief in the separation of church and state. From architecture to art, priests, parishioners, preservation professionals and the general public have unique relationships with historic sacred spaces. These relationships are further complicated when historic sacred spaces are community landmarks reaching beyond the faith community they serve. The Second Vatican Council's liturgical and theological reforms add a layer of complexity and meaning to historic American Churches. Many Roman Catholic churches, specifically their interiors, were altered to conform to new ritual practice while simultaneously reflecting the architectural and social trends of the 1960's and 1970's.¹ The Council's liturgical reforms reflect shifts in the way Catholicism has been practiced since that time and illuminate the intrinsic link between church architecture and the belief system of those who use it.

The Second Vatican Council reformed liturgical practices, embraced new ideas with regard to the lay community's role in the Church, and allowed for alteration of existing church buildings while encouraging new designs for future churches. However, the effect of these reformations transcended the Catholic community in America; the preservation community became interested in how the Vatican directives would impact historic churches, specifically the alteration of the interiors, as well as the removal of communion rails, altars, statues and other great works of art and architecture.

¹ Throughout this thesis Church and the Catholic Church are used interchangeably. Additionally, this paper is only concerned with the Roman Catholic Church (as opposed to the Eastern Orthodox Church etc.) unless otherwise specifically noted.

Parishes and preservationists have not always seen eye to eye with regard to the treatment of historic church interiors. The writing of the following thesis draws on a platform of values-centered preservation to understand and give appropriate consideration to the interests of both parties. Values-centered preservation is a planning methodology that first seeks to understand the resource, whether it is a site, building, district etc. In this data collection phase a critical step is stakeholder identification. Stakeholders are groups of people who may have a shared history of the place or a vested interest in the future management of the place. When dealing with American Catholic Churches, the delineation of stakeholder groups is a difficult, but crucial step, especially when the church building is also a community architectural landmark. Decisions must be made as to which group's values have the highest priority when making preservation decisions, is it the faith community that uses the space, the neighborhood residents, or the professional preservation community that seeks to maintain the work of notable architects? Each group has some interest in the way a historic church is handled.²

Drawing upon the assumption in values-centered preservation that there are multiple facets of significance and key stakeholder parties involved in historic Catholic churches, this thesis pursues an in-depth examination of the liturgical changes to historic Catholic churches derived from the reforms instituted by the Second Vatican Council. These liturgical changes directly impacted existing historic churches and set the tone for new church design.

² For more information on values-centered preservation see Randall Masons' article "Theoretical and Practical Arguments for Values-Centered Preservation" in *CRM: The Journal of Heritage Stewardship*, volume 3 number 2 of Summer 2006.

Immediately following this introduction is a brief literature review. Part I examines the seeds of social change as well as the theological formation of the American Catholic Church in the 100 years preceding the Second Vatican Council. Part II outlines the key documents produced by the United States Council of Catholic Bishops. Finally, Parts III and IV outline the two most prominent, yet opposing views shaping the preservation issue provoked by Vatican II; first of those who believe the Second Vatican Council is responsible for what they view as the deformation of church architecture and countered by literature reflecting the opinion that change was driven by the secular world, specifically the philosophies of Americanism, Modernism, and the Liturgical Movement. This literature review highlights the most important sources consulted in the completion of this work, and on the two sides of the debate.

Chapter Two explores the development of traditional Catholic Church architecture. This chapter also outlines the features that differentiate Catholic and other Christian churches. It examines how Church dogma is displayed in church design and addresses the role architecture (religious and secular) plays in the creation of an experience. Additionally, this chapter examines the changes in traditional church architecture driven by the liturgical reformation as well as the influence of popular architectural movements, specifically functionalism and modernism.³

Chapter Three draws upon the works of Jay Dolan, Edward Hales and Thomas Woods, which are outlined in the literature review. Using these authors' discussions of Americanism and Modernism, this chapter examines the cultural trends such as the Civil

³ "Traditional" refers to the time period before 1962 and the Second Vatican Council.

Rights movement that emerged around the world prior to the Second Vatican Council. Additionally, Chapter Three also provides a brief history of the Council and ends with three illustrative case studies of churches that experienced the range of architectural responses to Vatican II: Mount Saint Michael's, Christ the Light Cathedral and Saint John the Baptist illustrate the manners in which Catholic Church architecture has developed and diversified since the close of the Second Vatican Council in 1965.

The practical realities of the issues linking theology to architecture discussed to this point area fleshed out in Chapter Four in the case study of Saint Francis de Sales Catholic Church in West Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This chapter studies the history of the parish leading up to Robert Venturi's 1968 installation of new interior furnishings. Venturi's design sought to bring the church into compliance with both Vatican II directives on the congregation's active participation in the Mass, as well as the United States Council of Catholic Bishops' decrees on Catholic Church design published in Environment and Art in Catholic Worship. While Venturi's design may have accomplished this goal, the work was so ill received that the congregation removed the furnishings almost immediately upon their installation.

Chapter Five closes this thesis by addressing the conflicts between beliefs, users, stakeholders, and architectural change, as seen through the lens of values-centered heritage management.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

Discussing Catholic architecture requires discussing Catholic theology as the two are inextricably linked. When studying the causes of the ecclesiastic architectural reformation that occurred after the Second Vatican Council the subject must be studied from many perspectives including theological conflict, architectural development and social changes. The sources used in the following thesis draw upon a wide range of texts exploring the myriad of contributing issues that were catalysts for the convention of the Council and the subsequent liturgical and architectural changes in American Catholic Churches.

PART I: SETTING THE STAGE: A REVIEW OF THEOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES FACING THE CHURCH

Dolan, Jay P. In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Hales, Edward E. E. The Catholic Church in the Modern World. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1958.

Woods, Thomas E. The Church Confronts Modernity. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

Jay Dolan, Edward Hales, and Thomas Woods address the challenges facing Catholic Church both from within as well as from society at large. Their review of the Church's response to popular philosophical and cultural developments explains the impetus for the Second Vatican Council. Hales and Woods concentrate on the issues facing the worldwide church; Dolan takes the issues the other two authors raise and applies them to American Catholicism.

Thomas Woods is a New York Times Best Selling Author and a Senior Fellow at the Ludwig von Mises Institute. In his work, The Church Confronts Modernity, Hales examines the Modernist movement, which gained steam at the end of the 19th and carried over into the early 20th centuries and caused a substantial stumbling block for the Catholic Church. Modernism was the combination of new philosophies and scientific discoveries including Darwin's *The Origin of the Species*. Additionally, the industrial revolution brought in a new era of consumerism and materialism; the Pope's traditional control over intellectual, scientific and moral standards was severely threatened. Pope Pious IX was so upset by the challenges Modernism seemed to pose to the Church that he wrote *Syllabus of Errors* in 1864 addressing the grievous mistakes of contemporary philosophers and society in general. In America in particular, there were two major theological controversies: "Americanism" and "Modernism." Americanism was "a term that referred to an extensive eagerness to ease the Church's discipline and present its doctrines in such a way as to appeal to modern man."⁴ Pope Leo XIII condemned this idea in his encyclical *Testem Benevolentiae* in 1899. While the definition of Modernism is less straightforward, Pope Pius X included "dogmatic evolution, vital immanence, subjectivism, and historical relativism"⁵ among the evils assembled under this heading.

Americanism and Modernism are the cornerstones to understanding the struggle between the Catholic Church as a whole and the American Catholic Church. These two movements threatened to the empire-like control the Church held over its members to this point in history.

⁴ Woods, Thomas E. The Church Confronts Modernity. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. 2.

⁵ *Ibid.* 2.

While Woods is able to examine pre and post Vatican II American Catholicism, Edward Hales published his work in 1958, four years before the opening of the Council. The Catholic Church in the Modern World follows the form of a general survey of the previous 200 years of Catholicism, but breaks down by country/region the way the Church was involved in a variety of historical events such as the chapter entitled “Mussolini, Hitler, and Pius XI” or “The French Revolution.”

Hales, an English Catholic historian and author of several books including Pio Nono and Napoleon and the Pope in addition to The Catholic Church in the Modern World, devotes several chapters to the Church in America where he, like Woods examines the challenges the Church faced raised by Americanism and the strains on Papal authority compounded by geographic distance from Rome. Additionally, Hales points out how the American Catholic Church was fundamentally different from its counterparts in Europe: unlike nations like France whose history included a governmental link between Rome and the monarchy, America was a melting pot of every religion and nation and at no point in its history had any such tie to the Church. Illuminating this point, the Church’s ‘Parliament of Religions’ held at the Chicago Columbus Exhibition of 1892 during which representatives of the world’s great religions were invited “to show the basic unity of men’s religious beliefs...and to explain their own peculiar tenets without attacking those of the others”⁶ was a great success. When a similar meeting was attempted a few years later at the Paris World Exhibition, the Archbishop of Paris objected so strongly, the meeting was never convened.

⁶ Hales, Edward E. E. The Catholic Church in the Modern World. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1958. 181.

Building upon this historical base of dissent between the American Church and the Church as a whole, Jay Dolan's work In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension brings the conflicts into the period immediately preceding the Second Vatican Council. Through a retrospective of the issues of Modernism and Americanism the Church faced in America, Dolan, Professor Emeritus of History at Notre Dame College, explains that the 1960's were a major turning point for American Catholicism, given the election of John F. Kennedy, the first Catholic President, as well as a new Pope, John XXIII, known for his "modern, urbane style"⁷ contrasting with that of his predecessors. The culmination of the events of the preceding 100 years was the Second Vatican Council.

Dolan examines the effects of the Council on American Catholicism in the subsequent 40+ years. The possibility of the Church's new direction and embrace of change was welcomed with hope and excitement. However, for many Catholics in America, the realization that the Church could change left many parishioners uncomfortable at best and disillusioned at worst. Two camps of American Catholics developed, some who

...resented change in what they believed was an unchanging institution... [and] others [who] wanted more change and were disappointed ...for what they believed was a too hesitant and cautious endorsement of reform.⁸

The internal conflicts were not new to the American Catholic Church, but for the first time in history, there was a defined moment at which theological change could be

⁷ Dolan, Jay P. In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. 192.

⁸ *Ibid.* 195.

pinpointed. Understanding how the American Catholic Church theologically developed sets the stage for a more complete understanding of how and why the liturgical changes instituted by the Second Vatican Council were received with dramatically different degrees of acceptance. The Church, which had leaned heavily on hierarchy to maintain authority, was on the verge of accepting and encouraging its lay members into a more active and equal role in the celebration of the sacraments.

PART II: ECCLESIASTICAL DOCUMENTS

Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy. Environment and Art in Catholic Worship. Grand Rapids: Hunter Press, 1978.

Ciferni, Andrew D., OP "Overview of Environment and Art in Catholic Worship." Diocese of Winona. 10 Sept. 2008
<www.dow.org/documents/EACWstudyDOC.doc>.

National Conference of Catholic Bishops. Built of Living Stones. Grand Rapids: United States Council of Catholic Bishops, 2001.

Second Vatican Council. Sacrosanctum Concilium: Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. 4 Dec. 1963.

The ecclesiastical documents produced by the Second Vatican Council, most notably *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, sought to clarify and codify many of the changes the world-wide Catholic Church was experiencing. Among the pressures on the Church was a growing sense of independence of the people and lessening of papal authority.

Additionally, the American congregations were growing tired of feeling excluded from rituals, especially the Mass, by traditions such as the all-Latin rite. *Sancrosanctum*

Concilium represented the realization of the Church authorities that theology and ritual must be updated to stay current and applicable to modern life.⁹

A major concept that emerged from the Council, specifically the document *Sancrosanctum Concilium*, was the idea of “active participation.” The term “active participation” refers to bringing the “People of God,” or the congregation, to fuller participation in the rites and rituals of the Mass. This term has also been interpreted as a call for redesign of the “House of God” or church building to accomplish this aim. In Built of Living Stones the Bishops emphasized the church building was to suit the needs of the congregation: they stated, “Every church building is a gathering place for the assembly, a resting place, a place of encounter with God...”¹⁰ This statement is a toned down version of the original written in Environment and Art in Catholic Worship which states, “The historical problem of the church as a *place* attaining a dominance over the faith community need not be repeated as long as Christians respect the primacy of the living assembly.”¹¹ The Bishops’ Committee not only encouraged new design, it said the modern church no longer needed to look to historical precedent for church design. Many United States Bishops and dioceses derived their authority to redesign churches from these lines. As a result, they accepted and encouraged new church design, specifically the shape of church buildings and placement of interior furnishings such as altars, as well

⁹ The opening lines of SC (Introduction. sec. 1 & 4) state that among the aims of the Second Vatican Council’s meeting and this document in particular is to “adapt more suitably to the needs of our own times and institutions which are subject to change... [as well as] where necessary, the rites be revised carefully in light of sound tradition, and that they be given new vigor to meet the circumstances and needs of modern times.”

¹⁰ National Conference of Catholic Bishops. Built of Living Stones. Grand Rapids: United States Council of Catholic Bishops, 2001. 6.

¹¹ Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy. Environment and Art in Catholic Worship. Grand Rapids: Hunter Press, 1978. 21.

as the removal of other fixtures such as reredos and communion rails, which were perceived as enforcing traditional hierarchies. However, this is a major point of contention; critics of redesign and modern church architecture cling to the belief the United States Council of Catholic Bishops took the idea farther than it was intended.

The United States Council of Catholic Bishops published further guidelines for renovation and redesign in the book Environment and Art in Catholic Worship and an additional document, Built of Living Stones: Art, Architecture, and Worship in 2001, which are designed to guide the American Catholic Church in the architectural implementation of the “active participation” concept. The Bishop’s prescriptions address various aspects of church design such as the role of religious art, the role of professionals, and the placement of liturgical furniture. These guidelines are not hard and fast regulations, but they do allow for a liberal interpretation of traditional forms and tend to be followed by many liturgical consultants. Critics of modern church design and renovations believe these guidelines are too liberal and the United States Council of Catholic Bishops has gone above and beyond what the Second Vatican Council called for, resulting in buildings that are a detriment to the faith community.

PART III: VATICAN II DRIVEN REFORMATION

Cotton, J. Randall. "ALTARations: Vatican II and Historic Church Interiors." Inspired (1989): 4-6-10-13.

Rose, Michael S. "Renovating or Ruining the Cathedrals?" Catholic World News. 15 Oct. 2001. 31 July 2008
<<http://www.ewnews.com/news/viewstory.cfm?recnum=20592>>.

Rose, Michael S. Ugly As Sin : Why They Changed Our Churches from Sacred Places to Meeting Spaces - and How We Can Change Them Back Again. New York: Sophia Institute Press, 2001.

Schloeder, Steven J. Architecture in Communion: Implementing the Second Vatican Council Through Liturgy and architecture. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998.

Michael S. Rose, an author who has written extensively on Catholic architecture believes the United States Council of Catholic Bishops took too much liberty in their interpretation of the Second Vatican Council's mandated changes in the design and presentation of church architecture. Rose insists that modern churches actually foster a selfish attitude of worshipers who build spaces more concerned with their comfort during worship than focusing on God. By clinging to, and misinterpreting "active participation," the United States Council of Catholic Bishops, Rose writes, has allowed the "People of God" (emphasis on *people*) to become more important than the "House of God" and God, himself.

Like Rose, J. Randall Cotton, of the Philadelphia Historic Preservation Corporation, recognizes the direct link between Vatican II and the renovation of historic churches. However, he does not go so far as to claim the renovations were a detriment to the Catholic faith. Rather, Cotton acknowledges that renovations have been done with care and minimal disruption in most cases, and points out churches where alterations have not been as seamless.

Stephen J. Schloeder is an architect specializing in Catholic Church design. His work Architecture in Communion gives theological, sociological, historical and liturgical context to modern Catholic churches. He also explores the specific architectural requirements of churches and seeks to explain the iconographic aspect of historic churches. Schloeder methodically examines the relationship between the Second Vatican

Council and church architecture, embracing the idea the two are linked, but never suggests ways in which to handle the liturgical changes.

PART IV: SECULARLY DRIVEN CHURCH REDESIGN

Rutler, George W., Rev "Ten Myths of Contemporary Church Architecture." Sacred Architecture Fall 1998. The Catholic Liturgical Library. 7 Nov. 2008 <<http://www.catholicliturgicallibrary.com/index/cfm/FuseAction/ArticleText/Index/65/SubIndex/116/ArticleIndex/24>>.

Smith, Randall. "Don't Blame Vatican II." Sacred Architecture Journal 13 (2007).

Stroik, Duncan G. "The Roots of Modernist Church Architecture." Duncan G. Stroik Architect, LLC. 2009. 6 Feb. 2009 <<http://www.stroik.com>>.

The above authors are among those who believe societal pressures, shifting cultural norms, and more importantly, changing architectural style and technological innovation had a greater impact on church design than Vatican II. Many in this camp point to the Modernist¹² movement's influence among many Protestant churches (e.g. Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple of 1904), which grew in popularity in the early part of the 20th century.¹³ Rutler, Smith and Stoik believe change was in the works for Catholic Church architecture long before the Second Vatican Council convened; the impetus for change was firmly rooted in the secular world, not theological changes.

This opinion is bolstered by the writings of the architects responsible for the renovations and they shed significant light on the state of church renovations. Robert Venturi, whose work at Saint Francis de Sales is profiled as a case study in Chapter Four, wrote in letters to the parish, letters to the editor; he continues to maintain the position

¹² The Modernist movement refers the architectural movement, not the philosophical concept of Modernism previously discussed in Part I.

¹³ Stroik, Duncan G. "The Roots of Modernist Church Architecture." Duncan G. Stroik Architect, LLC. 2009. 6 Feb. 2009 <<http://www.stroik.com>>.

that his work was in response to practical changes and that he responded sensitively to the existing fabric by introducing new materials, not by trying to imitate the original.¹⁴

The belief that secular forces played the largest role in church renovation/redesign holds that popular trends in both social attitudes and architecture are the source of radical (and often unpopular) renovations.

This shift from profane architecture to sacred is only noted within a select group of Catholic examples. While this paper only considers Catholic Churches, a compelling argument for the growing popularity of transforming urbane architecture into sacred spaces can be made when the scope is broadened to include all Christian denominations. A recent trend and complete break from tradition in the United States is to build “mega churches” such as Joel Osteen’s Lakewood Church in Texas where average weekly congregations number around 47,000 not including those who participate via streaming web video or television. This new “warehouse church” trend is further evidence for changing norms in religious architecture.

¹⁴ "Robert Venturi and Saint Francis de Sales." Personal interview. 7 Apr. 2009.

CHAPTER 2: THE ARCHITECTURE OF CATHOLICISM

Prior to the Second Vatican Council, thousands of Catholic churches were constructed around the world, each with unique designs yet all based upon the same guiding principles. Drawing from Vitruvius's three rules of architecture -- utility, strength and beauty -- Michael S. Rose makes a case for three natural laws of Catholic Church construction: 1. A Catholic Church must have verticality, 2. A Catholic Church must have permanence, and 3. A Catholic Church must have iconography.¹⁵ Rose believes the verticality symbolizes reaching for Heaven as well as creating a cavernous space where the worshiper is physically dwarfed reminding him or her that God is all-powerful. The importance of permanence is based upon the idea that, "The church, a building that will serve generation after generation, transcending time and culture, must be constructed of durable materials."¹⁶ Finally, iconography serves as visual reference points for contemplation; every image in a church means something or serves as a teaching point about the faith.

The floor plan of traditional churches is also steeped in meaning. In his work Architecture in Communion, Steven Schloeder explores the link between the anatomical form of the human body and the way in which it translates to the floor plan of churches; he writes,

Christ's head is at the apse, which is the seat of governance represented by the bishop's cathedra; the choir is his throat, from which the chants of the monks issue forth the praise of God; the transepts are his extended arms; his torso and legs form the nave, since the gathered faithful are his body;

¹⁵ Rose, Michael S. *Ugly As Sin : Why They Changed Our Churches from Sacred Places to Meeting Spaces - and How We Can Change Them Back Again*. New York: Sophia Institute Press, 2001.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 23.

the narthex represents his feet, where the faithful enter the church; and at the crossing is the altar, which is the heart of the church. The power and clarity of this image of the crucified Lord is precisely why it was the predominant model for church design until the second half of the twentieth century.¹⁷

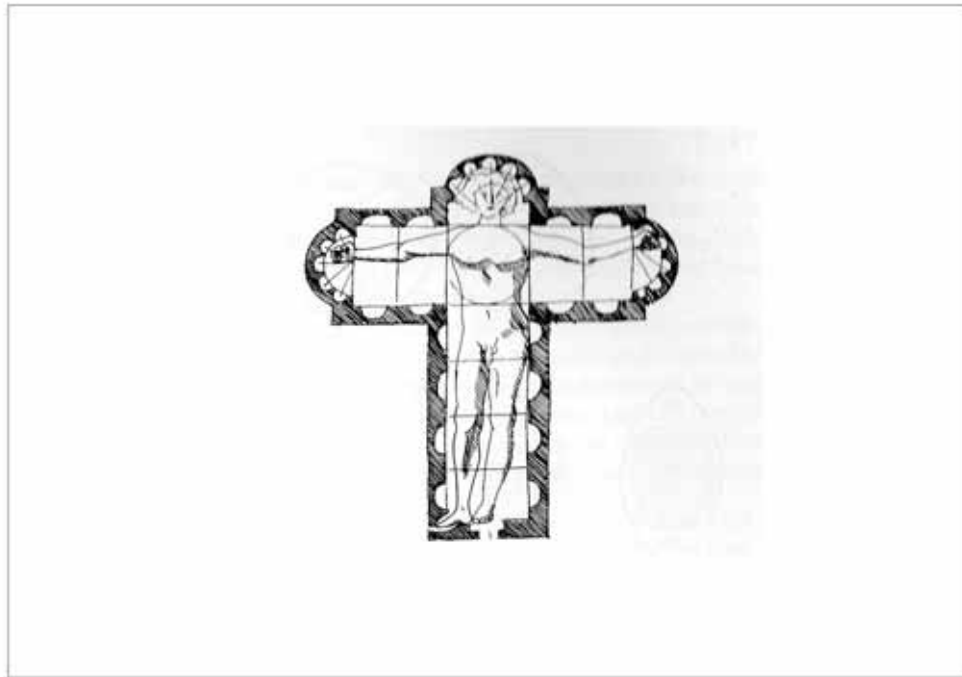
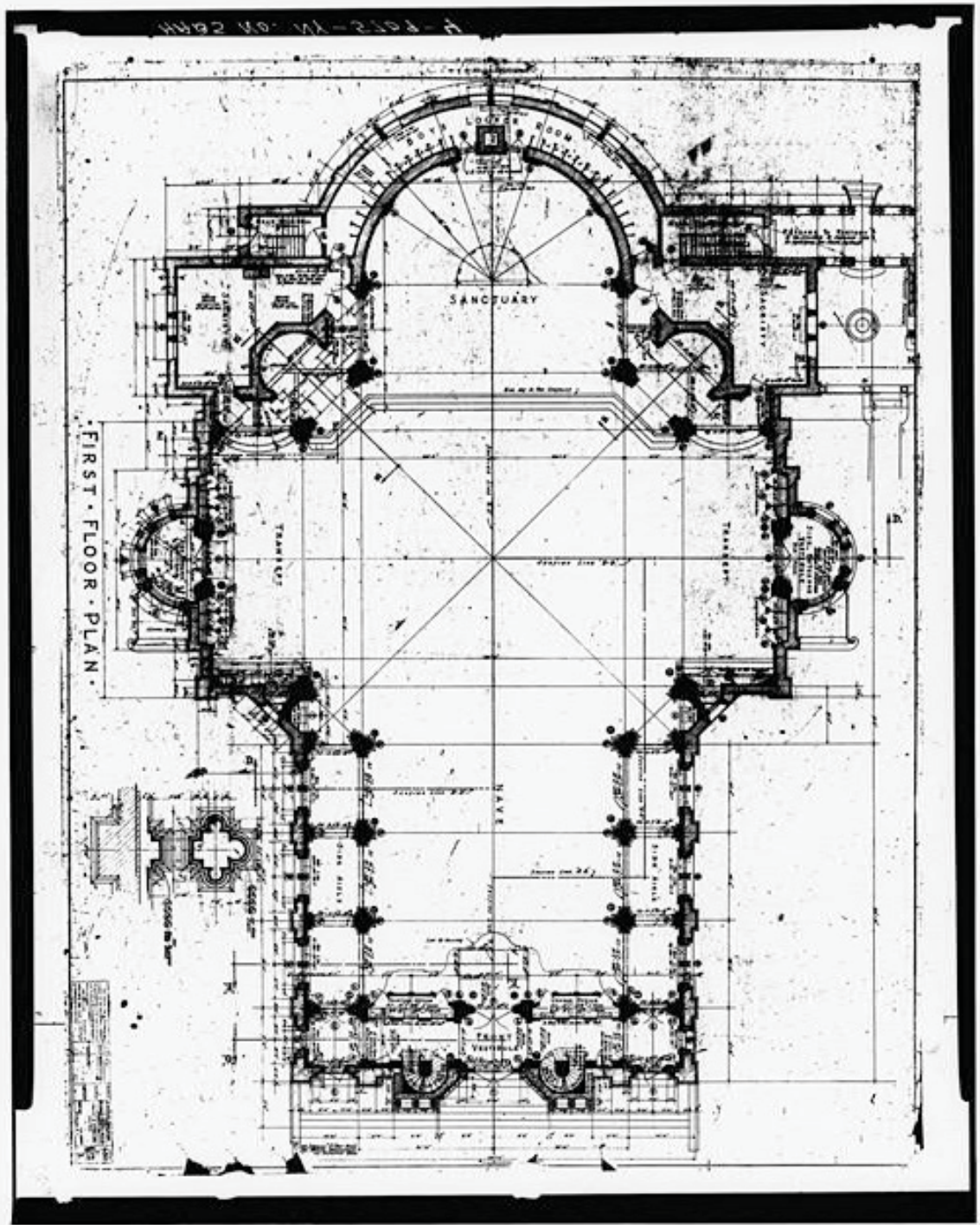


Diagram of Christ's body as the basis for traditional church floor plans.¹⁸

The traditional church building is built from the blueprint of the Faith and has a powerful impact on those who worship there.

¹⁷ Schloeder, Steven J. Architecture in Communion: Implementing the Second Vatican Council Through Liturgy and architecture. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998. 30.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 30.



Floor Plan of Blessed Trinity Roman Catholic Church, Buffalo, Erie County, NY. Image shows a typical, pre-Vatican II floor plan employing the cruciform shape as discussed above.¹⁹

¹⁹ HABS NY-5709. Drawing of First Floor Plan. 1933. Historic American Buildings Survey

Rose focuses on the *meaning* of elements in traditional churches; the United States Council of Catholic Bishops lists the *required* architectural elements necessary for the proper performance of the Mass. In their publication Environment and Art in Catholic Worship, the Bishops' tone reflects a wholehearted embrace of "active participation." They go so far as to say, "The liturgical space should have a 'good feeling' in terms of human scale, hospitality and graciousness. It does not seek to impress, or even less, dominate, but its clear aim is to facilitate the public worship and common prayer..."²⁰

THE IMPACT OF DESIGN ON EXPERIENCE

Humans are deeply affected by their environments: by natural and man-made forces, by art and architecture. The sense of insignificance felt in the middle of the ocean is just as powerful as the smallness a pedestrian feels among the skyscrapers of New York City. The built and natural environments are two different forces, but that humans react to both illustrates the impact and importance of environment. The human experience is shaped and manipulated by architecture; a particularly powerful notion when considering religious architecture, especially in the impact alterations to such a familiar environment has on the human experience.

What makes a sacred space sacred? What are the architectural clues the passerby understands that convey the purpose of a church? For hundreds of years it was the proportions of doorways to façades (height greater than width), quality and permanence

(Library of Congress), Blessed Trinity Roman Catholic Church, Buffalo.

²⁰ Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy. Environment and Art in Catholic Worship. Grand Rapids: Hunter Press, 1978. 25.

of materials (stone) and decorative elements (demons) that distinguished a church from a castle, a bank, or a house. However, with the advent of modernist architecture (and architects such as Robert Venturi), the clues that inform the user what purpose a building serves have been removed; minimalism, sleekness and ambiguity have taken over.

To understand the impact of post-Vatican II reformations, the elements that make a church (Christian or Catholic) must be made clear. There are many commonalities among Christian churches including altars, seating for the celebrant and the congregation, many have a choir loft, a pulpit, and some representation of the cross or crucifix.²¹ However, a deeper look exposes the differences between Catholic and other Christian denomination churches. The central difference is the presence of the Tabernacle containing the Holy Eucharist. A delineating factor between Catholics and other denominations is the Catholic belief that the consecrated bread and wine have undergone transubstantiation and actually *become* the Body and Blood of Jesus. Only Catholic Churches have a tabernacle where Jesus is believed to dwell.

The transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus which occurs during the Mass happens on the altar. Prior to Vatican II the altar was accessible on only three sides forcing the priest to perform the Mass with his back to the congregation. The altar was set against an elaborately carved backdrop called a reredo, and a communion rail cordoned off altar and apse. These interior architectural furnishings were frequently seen as having great historic and artistic value. Thus, their

²¹For clarity, a cross is the symbol of comprised of two intersecting, perpendicular lines, a crucifix has the image of Jesus nailed to the cross.

removal or alteration often caused a great deal of preservation controversy; congregations sought to modernize their churches in accordance with Vatican II directives while preservationists sought to protect the art and architecture.

After Vatican II the altar was “turned around” to face the people, a change that led frequently to the removal of the reredo and high altar -- interior architectural features frequently seen as having great artistic and historic architectural value, therefore their removal often sparked preservation controversy.

The popular explanation of “turning the altar “ to face the people is misleading; rather altars were either ignored, relegated to non-functioning decorative status or removed all together. When removal occurred original altars of stone were torn out and frequently replaced with altars of wood that more closely resembled a table. The new table was accessible on all four sides allowing the celebrant to face the people. When removal of the high altar occurred, it was done in an effort to conform to Environment and Art’s prescription that the altar’s “symbolic function...is rendered negligible when there are other altars in sight. The liturgical space has room for but one.”²² Occasionally, high altars were left intact, but devoid of any function other than decoration or as a space to place the tabernacle.

Another fundamental difference between Catholic and Christian churches are the presence of confessionals. A central tenant of Catholicism is the belief that frequent confession of sins must be made to a priest as a way to receive God’s saving Grace. Removing confessionals from the worship space and relegating them to the back of the

²² Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy. Environment and Art in Catholic Worship. Grand Rapids: Hunter Press, 1978. 34.

sanctuary or rooms off the narthex signals an attitude and focus shift from God to congregation.

Prior to the Second Vatican Council and (perhaps more importantly) the publication of Environment and Art in Catholic Worship, the confessional was a two-roomed chamber with an immovable partition between the penitent and the priest with a screen allowing for conversation between the two, but not visual or physical contact. In response to the Council's directive to embrace a new approach to the congregation, the United States Council of Catholic Bishops determined the Reconciliation Chapel should offer "the penitent a choice between face-to-face encounter or the anonymity provided by a screen"²³ On the surface this may seem like a minor change, yet in reality it represents a fundamental change in attitude which allows the individual a choice in how to experience a sacrament instead of an imposed format. Additionally, many confessionals in historic churches were altered either *in situ* or through relocation to accommodate this directive.

Individual choice with regard to the way sacraments are experienced is very clear with regard to seating. The wide variety of seating plans and pew types (moveable chairs, padded benches etc.) currently used in American churches demonstrates that worshiper comfort is the highest priority in seating design. Previously, hard, immovable, wooden pews represented the Church's theological rigidity and authority; their arrangement directed congregants' attention toward the altar and did not allow for engagement with fellow parishioners through face to face contact the way 'theater in the round does.

In pre-Vatican II churches, especially those at least 100 years and older, the seating is an unmovable, wooden pew. Wooden kneelers compliment the pews. The

²³ *Ibid.* 37.

pews and kneelers were purely utilitarian and not designed with worshiper comfort in mind. After the Second Vatican Council, a wide array of seating options have cropped up, including traditional pews, padded pews with attached kneelers, folding chairs, or no seating at all. A central aisle runs from the entrance to the altar, occasionally, side aisles will be present. However, as church design drew increasingly on a theater model, and focus shifted to the congregation's role in the celebration of the Mass, the congregation demanded accommodations for their comfort. Sanctuaries are now often set up like theaters in the round such as St. Bede Catholic Church in Williamsburg, Virginia.



Saint Bede Catholic Church, Williamsburg, VA. Example of “theater in the round”²⁴ approach to contemporary church design.

²⁴ Patel, Prakash. The Nave. 2004. Saint Bede Catholic Church, Williamsburg. 10 Apr. 2009 <<http://bedeva.org>>.

The United States Council of Catholic Bishops prescribes that, “Benches or chairs for seating the assembly should be so constructed and arranged that they maximize feelings of community and involvement...”²⁵ This means striving for a seating pattern and furniture that do not constrict people, but encourage them to move about when it is appropriate. This list comprised of communion rails, altars, pews, confessionals, and tabernacles locations highlights many of the areas in historic churches became that became targets for renovation or alteration. While it is not an exhaustive list of changes instigated by Vatican II and Environment and Art in Catholic Worship, the alterations described above are representative of the changing attitude that raises the priority of the parishioner’s experience and comfort. The perception shifts so that the church building’s primary function is no longer to serve as the House of God, rather it proclaims its members are the People of God who use the building to accommodate their needs, in addition serving as a place for worship.

While the shifting attitudes regarding the function and design of liturgical spaces were an important reflection of the changes in Catholicism, it was also an important moment in the preservation of historic church interiors. Until this point the Church functioned as the curators of their own interiors, preserving great art and architectural works through continued use. However, the decline in functionality of these works mirrored the decline of value placed upon them by their original stewards, the Church. The value loss was only associated with their theological usefulness; they continued to

²⁵ Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy. Environment and Art in Catholic Worship. Grand Rapids: Hunter Press, 1978. 32.

hold artistic and historic value to preservationists. This value shift is the crux of the conflict between the Church and preservationists; whose values carry more weight?

MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The choice of materials should not be overlooked whether it is with regard to the exterior construction or interior design elements. Many, if not all of the elements of Catholic Churches discussed above, were impacted by material choices.

Environment and Art in Catholic Worship unabashedly advocates for the incorporation of modern forms of both art (i.e. music) and architecture, and directly addresses the issue of material considerations. The Bishops decree that “Whatever the style or type, no art has a right to be in liturgical celebration if it is not of high quality...” They go on to define quality by ruling out “anything trivial and self-centered, anything fake, cheap or shoddy, anything pretentious or superficial.”²⁶ Building upon this earlier definition of quality, Built of Living Stones states, “Quality is evident in the honesty and genuineness of the materials that are used.”²⁷ Despite the Bishops’ descriptions about what quality is not, their descriptions fall short of definitively explaining what quality should be. Finally, they temper their previous wholesale endorsement of new art and architecture by reminding parishes of the value of historic works;

In the construction of new church buildings, there is no standard pattern for church art nor should art and architectural styles from any particular time or culture be imposed arbitrarily upon another community. Nonetheless, the patrimony of sacred art and architecture provides a

²⁶ *Ibid.* 34

²⁷ National Conference of Catholic Bishops. Built of Living Stones. Grand Rapids: United States Council of Catholic Bishops, 2001. 51.

standard by which a parish can judge the worthiness of contemporary forms and styles.²⁸

The United States Council of Catholic Bishops' statement is well and good, but one must contemplate what a stone building with soaring ceilings and towers and rich decoration says, versus what a wooden building with low rooflines, a more human scale and minimal decoration represents; one gives a sense of permanence and strength, of reaching for the heavens, and the other conveys a greater connection to the temporal. Traditional and modern designs can use the finest materials to create a space where the same activities can occur, but it is highly unlikely the same feeling exists in both.

The material composition of an object or building is just as important as its placement and function. The material conveys a layer of meaning about its use, the intention behind its design, and in the case of Catholic churches, something about the faith of which it is a part. The authenticity of materials in preservation is a topic worthy of papers and conferences and should always carefully be considered when designing a restoration or alteration.²⁹ The question must always be asked, "What is the design intervention going to say about this space?" This question reemerges with the Venturi case in Chapter Four. Venturi may have used vinyl and Plexiglas in a way that did not seek to deceive the user regarding the type of material, but the choice of such thoroughly modern and unnatural materials (*e.g.* plastic versus stone) did not match the quality of the pre-existing sanctuary furnishings.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 51.

²⁹ For a more in-depth discussion on material authenticity within preservation see: Matero, Frank G. "Loss, Compensation and Authenticity in Architectural Conservation." *Journal of Architectural Conservation* 12 (2006): 71-90.

IT'S NOT THE VATICAN'S FAULT? MODERNISM AND FUNCTIONALISM

In his article “Don’t Blame Vatican II: Modernism and Modern Catholic Church Architecture,” Randall Smith asserts that “bad architecture in America is the result, quite simply of American having bad ideas about architecture.” While the validity of this assertion is questionable, he nevertheless reflects a widespread frustration that modern churches reflect not only bad taste, but also more importantly “With modernist ‘functionalism’...we are often left with church buildings that make few, if any, references to the iconic heritage or architectural traditions of the Catholic Church.”³⁰ Smith’s views are widespread, though they are not groundbreaking.

Le Corbusier is simultaneously rued and heralded as the architect who introduced, or at least made acceptable, modernist forms for Catholic Churches. Le Corbusier’s 1955, Notre Dame du Haute at Ronchamp in France “...introduced a new expressionistic style... The curvaceous structure was... abstract... and it became an icon for Catholic churches in the 1960’s.”³¹ This abstract building style has continued to serve as inspiration for modernist churches such as the Cathedral of Christ the Light, Oakland, California (see Chapter 3). The abstraction of church architecture has been interpreted both positively, as the “breaking down of hierarchical definition... intended to enable ‘full and active participation’ by the laity,” and negatively, because “traditional elements that had enabled participation for centuries were rejected.”³²

³⁰ Smith, Randall. "Don't Blame Vatican II." *Sacred Architecture Journal* 13 (2007).

³¹ Smith, Thomas. "Architecture and Active Participation." *Antiphon: A Journal for Liturgical Renewal* 9 (2005): 124.

³² *Ibid.* 121.



Notre Dame du Haute, Ronchamp, France. Le Corbusier, 1955.³³

In 1968 Mr. Robert L. Durham, past president of the American Institute of Architecture delivered an address to the 29th Conference on Religious Architecture entitled “Sticks and Stones for Tomorrow.” His speech could easily be the text from which Smith draws inspiration as he writes, “Form has not followed function, it has been allowed to supplant function.” As Durham explains,

Technological advances have escalated the changes in architecture so that in the last twenty-five years we have developed styles, ideas, clichés...squeezed two hundred years of evolution into less than one-half the normal architect’s period of practice.³⁴

³³ Corner, Donald, and Jenny Young. “Notre Dame du Haute. Ronchamp,” Ronchamp, France. Great Buildings Online. <GreatBuildings.com>. 9 May 2009.

³⁴ Durham, Robert, L. FAIA. “Sticks and Stones for Tomorrow.” Faith and Form. 1 (1968): 6-7. 27.

The implications of this statement cannot be undervalued; it is applicable to both the physicality of material use as well as design practice and instead of becoming obsolete, his words have continued to grow in relevance some 40 years after they were uttered.

The Catholic Church has long been a patron of the arts and commissioned some of the most notable works through out the centuries. Over time, the Church has been a patron of the modern artists of each era such as Michelangelo and Alessandro di Mariano Filipepi, also known as Sandro Botticelli. The Church should follow this tradition by patronizing the artists and architects of the 20th and 21st centuries, but with caution. As Durham noted in 1968, technological design and innovation were becoming more rapid; until this point in history in theology and practice, change was very slow. The Second Vatican Council ushered in sweeping reforms in a matter of three years, the whiplash pace has never before been seen in Church history and has yet to be repeated in the 44 years since the close of the Council. Similarly, when great buildings took decades, not months to complete, change could occur both in the use of materials, as well as design, without a jarring effect and blatant disruption of tradition. Prior to 100 years ago, architects were perhaps less concerned with their own artistic prerogative and more with using design as "...a tool for accomplishing a purpose. [Architecture] may create delight, or fascination, or it may dull the spirit."³⁵

These sentiments began to fall by the wayside in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; evolving into a new discipline where the architect became an artist, architecture forged a new path through a dramatic break from the past. Perhaps the direction design took did not surprise those within the discipline, but the lay public was

³⁵ *Ibid.*

seeing forms which had little, if any precedence in vernacular architecture of Main Street America. These new architectural forms were exciting and scary because they represented a new era and uncharted territory for society. As David Lowenthal explains, “The past is integral to our sense of identity; ‘the sureness of “I was” is a necessary component of the sureness of “I am.””³⁶ If there is no connection to the past, there is a danger in feeling adrift in the present; a major reason the disruption of the comforts of Catholic tradition were an anchor in a sea of change. Additionally, Lowenthal explains why a lack of rootedness in the past is an impulse for preservation:

The impulse to preserve is partly a reaction against the increasing evanescence of things and the speed with which we pass them by. In the face of massive changes we cling to the remaining familiar vestiges. And we compensate for what is gone with an interest in its history.³⁷

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with exploring new architectural styles; rather it is the dramatic break from the past and the feeling of displacement accompanying a new physical environment that perhaps makes the users feel uneasy. The Second Vatican Council’s meeting is the dramatic break from the past for the Catholic Church as the architectural changes reflect. Historic churches represented the secure past and the allowance of their renovation or encouraging new, modern design, the Church looked forward to an uncertain world, a change not welcomed by all parishioners.

³⁶ Lowenthal, David. The Past is a Foreign Country. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. 41.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 399.

CHAPTER 3: THE SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

THE CHURCH AS CRUCIBLE; THE COUNCIL AS CATALYST

The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, commonly referred to as Vatican II, was held from 1962-1965 under the direction of two Popes, Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul IV.³⁸ The meeting of 2,400 priests commenced on October 11, 1962. This was the twenty-first ecumenical council, yet is called the Second Vatican Council because it was the follow-up to the First Vatican Council, which adjourned in 1870. The First Council is primarily known for settling the issue of Papal Infallibility.³⁹ Infallibility is the belief that the Pope, when speaking *ex cathedra* (from the Chair of St. Peter) on matters of doctrine, is speaking the absolute truth.

Unlike its predecessor called to address dogmatic concerns, the Second Vatican Council was called from “the ascertainment of the crisis, caused in modern society from the decaying of spiritual and moral values.”⁴⁰ Through the internal conflicts Americanism and Modernism, the liturgical movement, and growing dissention among its members provoked, the Church recognized it needed to update its practices and find new ways to incorporate the “people of God” in a more active way than ever before. Simply

³⁸ Carbone, Vincenzo. "Vatican Council II: Light for the Church and for the Modern World." Jubilee 2000 1 May 1997. The Holy See. 10 Jan. 2009
<http://www.vatican.va/jubilee_2000/magazine/documents/ju_mag_01051997_p-21_en.html>.

³⁹ Oteanu, Michael. "The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council." Christus Rex 1995. 31 Jan. 2009
<<http://www.christusrex.org>>.

⁴⁰ Carbone, Vincenzo. "Vatican Council II: Light for the Church and for the Modern World." Jubilee 2000 1 May 1997. The Holy See. 10 Jan. 2009
<http://www.vatican.va/jubilee_2000/magazine/documents/ju_mag_01051997_p-21_en.html>.

through the recognition of the need for the Council, the Church demonstrated that “culture does indeed influence religion... the church does not live in a vacuum or cultural enclave, but in a society with which it is always interacting,”⁴¹ However, then as now, the Church was not united in its views regarding the outcome of the Council’s meeting; as Ian Linden points out,

New things were already happening before [the Council], and old things continued afterwards. Old ways withered and died and new ones were given permission to grow and flourished. The Church was the crucible; the Council was the Catalyst...It brought together several slowly growing movements and gave them momentum and traction.⁴²

The Council produced a variety of new documents on Church teaching and practice, including *Sancrosantum Concilium*, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*. This document codified active participation, which was not universally embraced by all Catholics. Older parishioners were most opposed to the changes; among those considered drastic and profane was the extension of the “kiss of peace” from a gesture performed by the celebrant to include congregants offering each other some physical gesture such as a hand shake or hug. Additionally, the Mass was to be spoken in the native language of the congregation instead of the traditional Latin.

Perhaps much less predictable were the practical implementations of such new ideas. Although the core of the Church’s theology remained untouched (*e.g.* the doctrine on the Holy Trinity), many practices evolved that changed the way the Mass was celebrated and fundamentally altered the interior design of churches. Additionally, the

⁴¹ Dolan, Jay P. In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. 200.

⁴² Linden, Ian. Global Catholicism: Pluralism and Renewal in a World Church. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009. 261.

exterior Church architecture began to reflect an embracing of new ideas with architectural forms mimicking new ideas on how to practice Catholicism.

CULTURAL TRENDS AND TENSION: A CATHOLIC RESPONSE

Immediately following World War Two, the United States grew in economic prosperity and emerged as a world leader. Concurrently, the American Catholic Church was vibrant and growing both monetarily and in membership. By the 1960's however, various Civil Rights Movements as well as never-before-seen issues such as nuclear threats were replacing the stability the country and the Church enjoyed in the wake of World War Two.. Increasingly, American Catholic Church membership was comprised of parishioners who were not only more aware of world events, but were more empowered than previous generations to make demands of institutions for change (*e.g.* Civil Rights protests, sit-ins and freedom marches). Paralleling social changes, new and exciting innovations surfaced in architecture and the arts. Information traveled across the globe with more rapidity and the winds of social change were universally felt. The people felt empowered for the first time to make demands of the Church in a way that asked for reformation not by establishing new sects of Christianity, rather through seeking to adapt current practice to address modern concern.

Vatican II was not held in response solely to issues Catholics in America were raising and facing. The Second Vatican Council addressed matters facing the worldwide church, but the American Catholic Church was growing as a major component of the greater whole; the issues that arose in the States were simultaneously unique and representative of issues facing the universal church.

Despite the pressures on the Church leading up to the 1960's, the push to more fully adapt the traditions of the church to increase the lay community's participation in worship began much earlier. The seeds of change within the church began to emerge in the 1800's with the liturgical movement in addition to Americanism and Modernism. The liturgical movement began in Europe, most notably in monastic communities in France, Belgium and Germany. These groups pushed an agenda that included translation of the Mass from Latin to native languages, as well as increased frequency of the reception of Holy Communion.⁴³ All Christian churches, and the Catholic Church in particular, felt the liturgical movement's impact. It even "...played a significant role with the 1947 encyclical *Mediator Dei*, in which [Pope Pius XII] stressed the importance of liturgy and the need for people to participate."⁴⁴ The purpose of these changes was to allow the congregation to move from passive observers to engagement in the liturgy through participation as lectors and Eucharistic ministers. The Second Vatican Council embraced these ideas; the reformation is reflected in the subsequent architectural design modifications to existing churches as well as new church design.

The interpretation and incorporation of the idea of *active participation* greatly influenced ritual practice and space. While the theological application of active participation may trace its roots to the liturgical movement, there is evidence this concept also has strong beginnings to various philosophical movements including democracy, especially in the American Catholic Church.⁴⁵

⁴³ ""Liturgical Movement." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 2009. Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. 12 Feb. 2009 <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/344314/Liturgical-Movement>>.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*.

⁴⁵ Dolan, Jay P. *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in*

The Catholic Church relies heavily on hierarchy to maintain order and control of itself as well its members, however, the United States of America were founded on the ideal of democracy and in revolt against a monarchy. With this idea as the foundation of America, it is no surprise that conflict between American Catholics and the hierarchy of the Church developed into Americanism. Despite Vatican II, and although the conflict is somewhat subdued since Vatican II, the central authority of Rome and American Catholics continue to butt heads. This conflict is routinely on display when any pro-choice Catholic politician runs for office and is subsequently forbidden to receive Communion by the United States Council of Catholic Bishops. Of late, Vice President, Joe Biden was on the top of a long list that includes John Kerry and Kathleen Sebelius, all of whom were directed against full participation in Mass.⁴⁶

A LASTING IMPACT: CHURCH DESIGN IN THE 44 YEARS AFTER VATICAN II

Concurrently with the power struggle of the early 20th century between Rome and Washington, trends in art and architecture were diverting from traditional forms as well. The Modern Dance movement began around 1900 with dancers, such as Isadora Duncan and Martha Graham in the 1930's, who rejected the classicism and rigidity of ballet; artists experimented with new forms and styles such as expressionism and cubism, and architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis I. Kahn were shaking up traditional

Tension. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. 204.

⁴⁶ Sullivan, Amy. "Does Biden Have a Catholic Problem?" Time Magazine 13 Sept. 2008. 5 May 2009 <<http://www.time.com/time/politics/article/0,8599,18409565,00.html>>.

architectural forms. Society and culture were rapidly changing and modernizing and Americans were leading the charge. The Catholic Church desperately needed to update itself if it was to remain relevant. The Second Vatican Council was held in response to the changing times and signaled to the world that in spite of 2000 years of what appeared to unwavering tradition, the Church was not only capable of, but embraced change.

Over the course of the last forty-four years since the close of the Second Vatican Council in 1965, the landscape of Catholic Churches and Catholicism in America have greatly changed. The American Catholic Church has faced highly publicized and costly scandals such as the infamous abuse cases in Boston. Additionally, Mass attendance continues to fall as the neighborhood parish declines as the epicenter of community life. John Allen, a Vatican columnist for the weekly *National Catholic Reporter* describes this trend writing, "Parishes are often sacramental filing stations- people come for the Eucharist, baptisms, marriages and funerals, but little else."⁴⁷ Weekly attendance rates declined from 44% in 1987 to 37% in 1999, a trend attributable to both declining urban populations as well as weakening ties to the Catholic Church, though perhaps not a wholesale rejection of religion; "American Catholics have become consumers, church-shopping ... choosing their parish by the school or the theological perspective or the music that matches them."⁴⁸

Critics of modern church design argue these trends are due in part to the changes they perceive as the Second Vatican Council's assignment of the people to a higher priority over God. The cutting edge design of churches built or remodeled in the

⁴⁷ Grossman, Cathy L., and Anthony DeBarros. "Church Struggles With Change."
USA Today 7 November 2004. 22 April 2009
<http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2004-11-07-church-main_x.htm>.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

immediate wake of the Council are themselves becoming more historical and antiquated than contemporary; they are being relegated to the same status of historical like the those they were originally intended to update or replace.

However, despite declining attendance and parish closures primarily in the older Northeast and Midwest cities, new churches are being built in their suburbs as well as in the southern United States where for instance, “From 1990 to 2003, the number of Catholics in Dallas more than quadrupled.”⁴⁹ Existing traditional buildings and congregations does not constrain these new churches, rather, they take the opportunity to explore new forms completely separate from the old. Additionally, some churches are making an effort to return to pre-Vatican II layouts and design. The result is a hodgepodge of Catholic Church Architecture that mirrors the myriad of ways people practice today’s Catholicism. The following is a brief overview of some of the ways Church architecture is evolving across the United States.

MOUNT SAINT MICHAEL, SPOKANE, WASHINGTON

Mount Saint Michael in Spokane, Washington, a church that rejects without exception, every reformation of the Second Vatican Council.⁵⁰ The Parish is not officially part of the Diocese of Spokane, rather it is the home of traditionalist Catholics, although there is a religious order of brothers and nuns who are associated with the church. Mount Saint Michael is part of a group of ultra-conservative Catholics called the traditionalist movement. Traditionalist churches provide contemporary examples of pre-

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ This parish is not officially part of any Catholic diocese, rather it is the home of traditionalist Catholics .

Vatican II practice and architecture and can serve as a baseline for comparison of post-Vatican II parishes.

The picture of the sanctuary below shows a full communion rail across the front of the sanctuary, unmovable, wooden pews facing the altar, which is only accessible on three sides. Every element of the sanctuary conforms to pre-Vatican II design standards.



Sanctuary of Mount Saint Michael church including the communion rail and only one altar.⁵¹

CHRIST THE LIGHT CATHEDRAL, OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

On September 25, 2008, the Cathedral of Christ the Light was dedicated in Oakland, California. The new Cathedral, which only took three years to construct, was

⁵¹ Mount Saint Michael's Sanctuary. Spokane. 15 Apr. 2009 <<http://www.stmichaels.org>>.

built as a replacement for the Cathedral of Saint Francis de Sales after it was lost to the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989.⁵² As the name suggests, the design's primary focus uses natural light to create a sense of mystery inside in a similar manner employed by traditional churches through the use of stained glass to manipulate light to create a sense of mystery in the interior. Despite this similarity, there is no way Christ the Light could be confused with an historic, pre-Vatican II church.

Christ the Light Cathedral, relies on some traditional symbolism such as light and crosses, and employs several distinctly post-Vatican II design standards including "theater in the round" seating, no high altar. Additionally, the primary building materials are wood, glass, and steel, not stone and mortar, resulting in a thoroughly modern construction. The Oakland Diocese clearly embraces the new direction the Second Vatican Council advocated both in design and name, stating,

"The name is a departure from the tradition of naming cathedrals after Mary the Mother of God or a patron saint. In dedicating its mother church to Christ the Light the Diocese of Oakland highlights the role that Christ must play in the new millennium."

Interestingly, in choosing the name, the building committee also looked directly to the document *Lumen Gentium*, which came out of the Second Vatican Council's document on Dogmatic Constitution on the Church; the opening line reads, "Christ is the light of the nations."⁵³

⁵² "Hallmark Events of the Catholic Church in the East Bay." The Cathedral of Christ the Light. 2009. The Diocese of Oakland. 10 Oct. 2008 <<http://www.oakdiocese.org/>>.

⁵³ "Naming the Cathedral of Christ the Light." The Cathedral of Christ the Light. 2009. The Diocese of Oakland. 5 Jan. 2009 <<http://www.oakdiocese.org/>>.

From its name to its design, the Diocese of Oakland and its new cathedral have embraced the opportunity to move forward with non-traditional forms fully in-line with the reforms of Vatican II. The progressive design was easy to embrace given that Saint Francis de Sales was totally destroyed.



Interior of Christ the Light Cathedral⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Rubio, Cesar. Christ the Light Interior. 2008. The Cathedral of Christ the Light, Oakland. Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill LLP. 3 Mar. 2009 <<http://www.SOM.com>>.



Exterior of Christ the Light Cathedral⁵⁵

SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST, TRYON, NORTH CAROLINA

Unlike Christ the Light Cathedral, Saint John the Baptist in Tryon, North Carolina was constructed in 1962, coinciding with the opening Second Vatican Council. While the Council had not yet codified many of the documents and reformation, the seeds of social, religious and architectural change were already sown in the United States, and are reflected in the minimalist architecture of this small church.

This simple church in the Diocese of Charlotte does not make a striking statement on the landscape like Saint Francis de Sales in Philadelphia or Christ the Light in Oakland, yet it is representative of a small, but growing movement to return to more

⁵⁵ Rubio, Cesar. Christ the Light Exterior. 2008. The Cathedral of Christ the Light, Oakland. Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill LLP. 6 May 2009 <<http://www.SOM.com>>.

traditional designs dating to before Vatican II. Recently renovated, the parish replaced the existing simple wooden pulpit and altar with a high altar, central altar and new pulpit, and most surprising of all, a communion rail.

The Cathedral of Christ the Light, Saint John the Baptist and Mount Saint Michael's are three churches in a post-Vatican II world, distinctly different, yet universally Catholic that have responded to the Second Vatican Council's reforms in unique ways. However, it is in their differences that they uniformly reflect the new direction of the Church to empower and engage the people. Many post-Vatican II Catholic churches lack the traditional forms and materials of historic churches, they represent the plurality of liturgical elements, languages, and groups the Church now embraces, while remaining faithful the core dogma of Catholicism.



April 2003



Before and after pictures of the sanctuary of Saint John the Baptist Church.⁵⁶

Saint John the Baptist serves as a representative of the movement to bring post-Vatican II churches inline with pre-Vatican II directives. Additionally, this movement is important for the preservation of historic church interiors. These churches built after the 1960's are often retrofitted with furnishings removed from other historic churches. While some preservationists may suggest the furnishings no longer possess their original value, these Catholic churches are preserving historic art and architecture through continued use.

⁵⁶ Tribe, Shawn. Before and After. Saint John the Baptist, Sanctuary, Tryon, North Carolina. New Liturgical Movement. 14 Apr. 2009. Sacred Liturgy and Liturgical Arts. 18 Apr. 2009 <<http://www.newliturgicalmovement.org/2009/04/another-church-renovation-st-john.html>>.

CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDY: SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES

“You must know what you believe before you build.”⁵⁷



Front elevation of Saint Francis de Sales in West Philadelphia.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Durham, Robert, L. FAIA. “Sticks and Stones for Tomorrow.” *Faith and Form*. (1968).

⁵⁸ Boucher, Jack. Saint Francis de Sales Roman Catholic Church. Sept. 1973. HABS No. PA-1640, 4629- 4635 Springfield Avenue, Philadelphia.

Saint Francis de Sales Catholic Church located in West Philadelphia is the embodiment of every issue discussed in this thesis. The building is an iconic, neighborhood landmark on 47th and Springfield Streets, by virtue of the highly visible golden dome rising above the trees, the Byzantine and Roman flourishes, the massive scale, and its long existence. In 1968, in response to Vatican II's reforms, liberal clergy, and a letter entitled "Commission on the Sacred Liturgy" to the parish from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia that strongly urged "...suitable steps be taken to erect [a free standing altar]... within the current calendar year," the Parish undertook a landmark renovation designed by world-renowned Philadelphia architect Robert Venturi.⁵⁹ The parishioners met the installation with a loud outcry and tore it out almost as soon as it was completed. The case of the Venturi renovation, and the subsequent removal, are representative of the Church architectural reformation sweeping the country post-Vatican II.

⁵⁹ Archdiocese of Philadelphia. "Commission on the Sacred Liturgy." Letter to Saint Francis de Sales parish. 19 June 1968. University of Pennsylvania Architectural Archives VSB 225.II.A.25.7.

PARISH HISTORY



Interior of St. Francis de Sales on Scout Sunday, 1949. Communion rail and high altar still intact.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Scout Sunday. 1949. 1947 - 1972 Scrapbook, Sanctuary of Saint Francis de Sales, Philadelphia. Boy Scout Troop 152. Ed. Bernie Kelley. 20 Apr. 2009 <http://www.geocities.com/troop_152/history/index.html>.



Interior of Saint Frances de Sales pre-1965. Communion rail intact separating the congregation from the celebrant, high altar is the only central altar and is attached to the wall.⁶¹

Approximately one hundred twenty-five years ago Irish immigrants, mostly hired help for the wealthy in the affluent West Philadelphia neighborhoods, formed Saint Francis de Sales parish.⁶² Saint Francis as a namesake was an unsurprising choice given that. “He had an intense love for the poor, especially those who were of respectable family.”⁶³ Outreach to the diverse immigrant neighborhood population continues to be a cornerstone of the parish’s mission.

In 1890 Father O’Neill purchased the plot of land at the corner of 47th and Springfield Avenue in the Spruce Hill neighborhood of West Philadelphia for \$15,000.00

⁶¹ Diamond Jubilee 1890-1965. Philadelphia: Saint Francis de Sales, 1965. The Athenaeum of Philadelphia holdings. 26.

⁶² "Susan Weiler, FASLA, Partner, The Olin Firm." Personal interview. 6 Feb. 2009.

⁶³ Pernin, Raphael. "St. Francis de Sales." The Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 6. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909. 5 Apr. 2009.

and construction began on the large, Byzantine inspired church. Eventually, a school, convent, rectory, and church would occupy this site. In 1907 Reverend Michael Crane, the second pastor, laid the cornerstone, although it was not until November of 1920 that the church was consecrated and the debt cleared. Over the next few decades minor renovations and upkeep were performed when in 1956 the golden dome was retiled. However, this renovation did not affect the liturgical space. Liturgical changes resulting from the Second Vatican Council went into effect on the feast of Saints Peter and Paul in 1967. In June 1968 Father McNamee and Father Daniel Quinn were assigned to Saint Francis, they were subsequently reassigned in 1973 to other parishes.⁶⁴

The Industrial Revolution and the capability to build open, expansive spaces as well as the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, inspired Henry Dagit, the project architect.⁶⁵ However, Charles Biswanger of the Dagit firm is credited with the interior design. The intricate stained glass windows were the product of D'Ascenzo Studios and the stonemason was John Hagan and Company. The Atlantic Terra Cotta Company produced the internal and exterior architectural terra cotta, and the Pennsylvania Marble and Granite Company installed the ashlar white rock face.⁶⁶

Perhaps the most iconic part of the building is the golden dome supported by the Guastavino tile system. Rafael Guastavino, a Spanish immigrant, who developed an arch

⁶⁴ Curran, Frances F., ed. Saint Francis de Sales; the First 100 Years. Philadelphia, 1990. The Athenaeum of Philadelphia holdings. 15-29.

⁶⁵ Baldwin, Lou. "Saint Francis de Sales: Preserving a Sacred Heritage." The Catholic Standard and Times 25 May 2006. 14 Apr. 2009
<http://www.archphila.org/cst_archives/060525/fourth.html>.

⁶⁶"Saint Francis de Sales Church." Philadelphia Architects and Builders. The Athenaeum, Philadelphia. 5 Apr. 2009
<http://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/pj_display.cfm/20991>.

construction method using interlocking terra cotta tiles and mortar to create a thin skin to hold up arches instead of traditional methods such as horizontal corbelling. Guastavino and his son formed the Guastavino Fireproof Construction Company that is responsible for approximately one thousand projects including the Boston Public Library, Grand Central Hall and Carnegie Hall, and Saint Bartholomew's Episcopal Church, all of New York City⁶⁷

Irish immigrants comprised the majority of the parish membership and they utilized the skills of well-known architects and designers to build a traditional church echoing the great Church architecture of Europe and the Near East. They used the finest materials and the result was an inspiring building worthy of notoriety. Because of this history, it should come as no surprise the Parish turned to another notable architect some sixty years later when they sought to update their church to adapt to the new recommendations of the Second Vatican Council, and more importantly, the United States Council of Catholic Bishops directives in Environment and Art in Catholic Worship.

Reverend John McNamee led the building committee; they chose Philadelphia firm of Venturi and Rauch. The firm's growing international reputation was an attractive quality to the parish. However, their architecture fell into a decidedly modern category, which was later categorized as post-modernist, a label Venturi rejects. Interestingly, when asked if he was surprised the church chose him, Mr. Venturi answered, "Yeah, I was!"⁶⁸

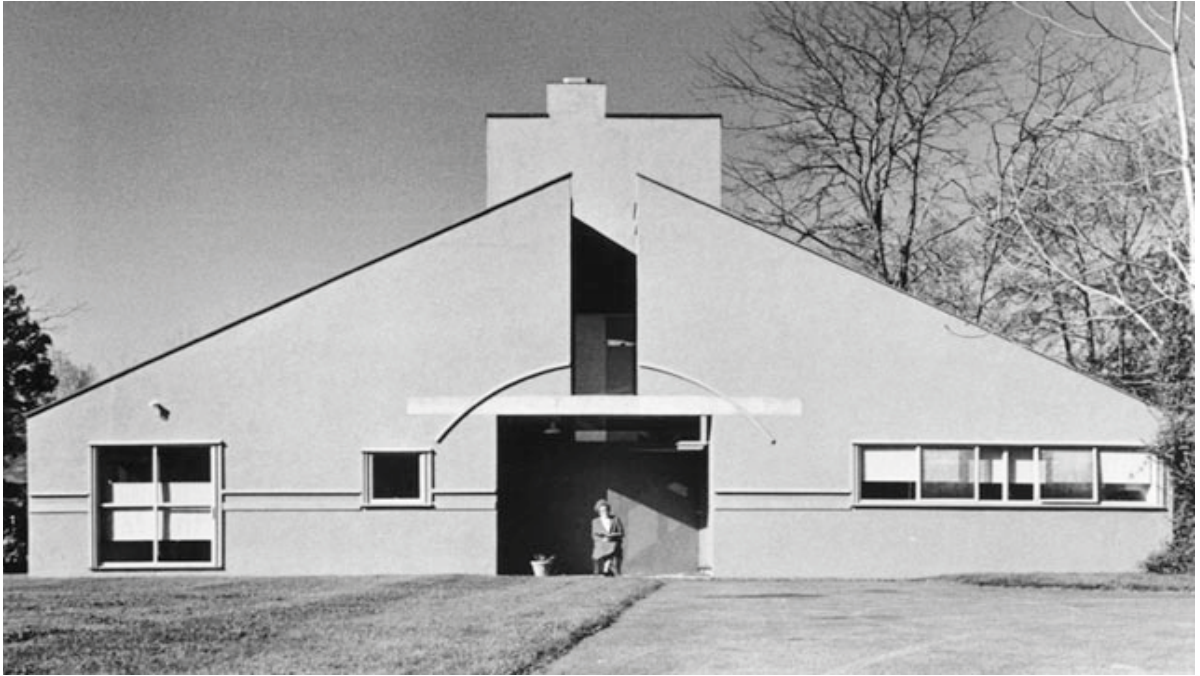
⁶⁷ Collins, George, Jaume Rossell, and Salvador Tarragó. Guastavino Co. (1885-1962) Catalogue of Works in Catalonia and America. Barcelona: Actar/Collegi d'Arquitectes de Catalunya, 2003.

⁶⁸ "Robert Venturi and Saint Francis de Sales." Personal interview. 7 Apr. 2009.

Venturi was interested in traditional forms and the use of new materials; he used new materials to suggest traditional forms. The Vanna Venturi house clearly demonstrates this through the suggestions of an arch over a doorway, a traditional element. However, Venturi's translations of historical forms are not always literal; he was inspired by history, but not bound by it.⁶⁹ Additionally, Venturi's master's thesis entitled, "Context in Architectural Composition" was a design for a chapel at his alma mater, Episcopal Academy, Merion, Pennsylvania. The driving philosophy behind the project employed a "history-based approach [that] was old fashioned, now that modernism's and antihistoricists rhetoric was well established, it sounded almost radical."⁷⁰ Perhaps this exactly why he was chosen by Father McNamee, who was himself labeled liberal and progressive by his parishioners.

⁶⁹ Two of Venturi's most notable publications are Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture and Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form. These award winning, architectural theory staples explore Venturi's philosophy on architecture for the "common" person and helped establish him as a major player in post modernist architecture.

⁷⁰ Brownlee, David, David G. DeLong, and Kathryn B. Hiesinger. Out of the Ordinary, Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown and Associates. New York: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2001. 10.



Vanna Venturi House.⁷¹

THE RENOVATIONS TAKE SHAPE

In 1968, three years after the close of the Second Vatican Council, Venturi and Rauch, Architects engaged with Saint Francis de Sales to bring the sanctuary into a new era, reflecting both current architectural trends as well as the theological and practical reforms. Fortunately for those who despised the new installation, the only permanent, physical alteration of the sanctuary was a partial removal of the altar rail. Altar rails were among the most commonly removed architectural features during the post-Vatican II renovation movement across the country. The rails were seen as a physical, psychological and spiritual barrier between the celebrant, the sacrament and the

⁷¹ Vanna Venturi House. 1964. Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia. Courtesy of Venturi, Scott Brown, and Associate, Inc.

congregation. Currently, portions of the altar rails stand extant in the sanctuary at St. Francis on either end of the altar, serving as a reminder of what was once there, and perhaps as what the Church now stands for: an open relationship between celebrant and congregation.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE INSTALLATION

The installation of Venturi's new furnishings required a few alterations to the existing historic fabric of Saint Francis's sanctuary. The partial removal of the communion rail left only a few feet on the extreme right and left ends of the ambo. Additionally, tiling covered the mosaic floor. At the writing of this paper the mosaic floor is being uncovered and refurbished as Saint Francis de Sales undergoing a major renovation/restoration project. Although, this restoration is not to return the Venturi installation, it is to repair water damage from ceiling leaks and other structural issues related to the tile dome, as well as the restoration of some of the pre-Venturi furnishings.⁷²

There are five distinct parts of Venturi's installation; the new altar, the celebrant's chair, the lectern, the suspended cathode light and the elevation of the sanctuary floor. Because the new additions were removed so quickly after their installation, it is not possible to give a first hand account of Venturi's work. However, a news release by Rohm and Haas Company from 1970 describes the pieces very clearly:

The 10-foot-wide altar occupies the center of the sanctuary. It is three feet high and nearly four feet deep and is made of curved sheets of 1/2 -inch-

⁷²"Susan Weiler, FASLA, Partner, The Olin Firm." Personal interview. 6 Feb. 2009.

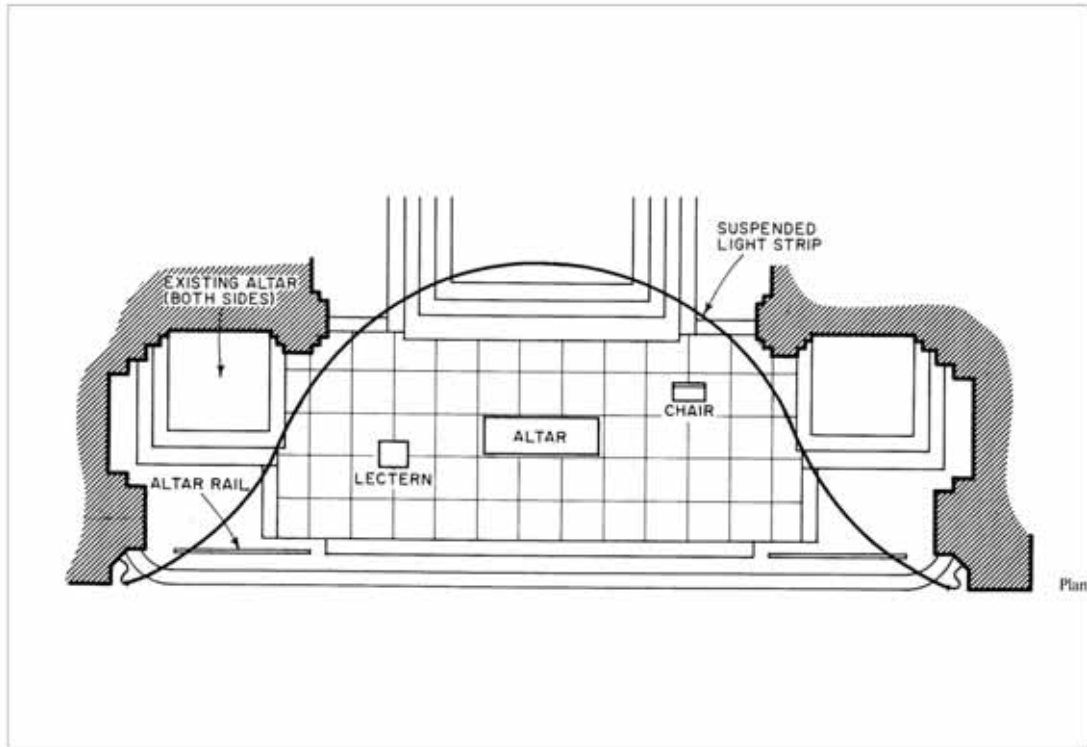
thick white Plexiglas sheet. Two gently curved sections of the same thickness of the acrylic sheet form the bases of the table. The matching, four-foot-high lectern is also made of ½-inch-thick Plexiglas acrylic. The dimensions of its top surface are 31-inches-wide by 26-inches-deep. The base is a curved section of the same acrylic plastic.⁷³

Additionally, the celebrant's chair was "...a simple wooden frame dressed in white vinyl fabric which match[ed] in tone and style the altar and lectern."⁷⁴ Finally, "A continuous ninety foot strip of cold cathode light suspended ten feet above the floor begins in the nave and weaves back into the altar and out again, separating the older area of celebration from the new space."⁷⁵

⁷³ Rohm and Hass Company. "Contemporary Furniture of Acrylic Plastic Graces Sanctuary Area of Philadelphia Church." Press release. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. 13 June 1970.

⁷⁴ Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, Inc. holdings of the University of Pennsylvania Architectural Archives. VSB225.II.A.25.5

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*



Plan view of the cold cathode tubing and placement of the new lectern, altar and chair. In this drawing the intention to separate the old and the new is clearly visible.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Von Moos, Stanislaus. Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown: Buildings and Projects. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1987. 301-02.



This picture illustrates the distinction between old and new is perhaps more clearly seen in plan and as a member of the congregation, the light tube serves as more of a distraction than as a juxtaposition between old and new. Photo Courtesy of Venturi Scott Brown and Associates, Inc.



Front view of the altar. Courtesy of Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, Inc.

BUILD WHAT YOU BELIEVE; THE AFTERMATH

The recurring theme in everything written about Robert Venturi's installation is that he believed in treating the existing building with respect and decided to make his additions so blatantly modern there would be no confusion between the old and the new. This juxtaposition was extremely important to him, even forty years and hundreds of projects later; he said

We took the approach necessary to acknowledge the building and quality and at the same time make [the installation] a modern and new aesthetic from juxtaposing the old and the new, employing an everyday commercial medium, neon.⁷⁷

Although the parish disagreed, Venturi did not approach this project as a self-indulgent exercise. Carefully reflecting on both the social and liturgical changes in the Church, he believed the yellow cathode tubing created a unique and unobtrusive partition between the old and the new (the old high altar facing away from the people and the new altar facing towards the people). He also was responding to a new frugality the Church and society were embracing:

These synthetic furnishings and the vinyl (rather than marble) tiles of the sanctuary floor are meant to convey other things also: the new awareness that we must not expend lavish sums on the decoration of buildings, however serious their purpose. In a world of acute human need we must use all imagination and resourcefulness to create beauty and service out of more modest materials and sources.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ "Robert Venturi and Saint Francis de Sales." Personal interview. 7 Apr. 2009.

⁷⁸ Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, Inc. holdings of the University of Pennsylvania Architectural Archives. VSB225.II.A.25.5

"LATEST NEWS: PARISH PUSSYFOOTERS HAVE DECREED THE REMOVAL
TO THE COLD CATHODE LIGHT."⁷⁹

Robert Venturi believed he was respecting the old while giving Saint Francis de Sales church a way to incorporate the new liturgical practices instituted by the Second Vatican Council. However, the feeling was not mutual. Letters to the editor were written, complaints lodged and eventually the architecturally conservative members of the parish won out with the nearly immediate removal of the cathode tubing and subsequent removal of the Plexiglas furnishings.

Emotions ran high when his design was ill received. Believing the parishioners were simply too conservative both socially and architecturally, Robert Venturi wrote a letter to the Arts Editor of Time Magazine:

This West Philadelphia parish is rift with tensions because it is 'integrating,' i.e. an existing elderly Irish population (those who didn't make it to the suburbs) feels itself to be invaded by blacks, students, and liberal priests. Most of the invaders' activities...cannot be fought, so perhaps architecture must bear the brunt of the congregation's anguish.⁸⁰

Undoubtedly, frustration caused by his design being misunderstood, was behind some of this letter, but it speaks to many of the larger issues the facing the Church. The world was changing in many ways and suddenly a place people found comfort in 2000 years of tradition was changing too. At Saint Francis de Sales in particular,

"The overwhelming majority [felt] that the altar, pulpit and chair [did] not in anyway fit into the beauty of the church they have loved over the years.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Venturi, Robert. "Letter to the Editor." Letter to Mr. A. T. Baker, Arts Editor. 17 July 1970. Time Magazine. Architectural Archives of the University of Pennsylvania. VSB 225.II.A.25.5

Nor can they appreciate the attempt at a blending of the old and the new.”⁸¹

For Saint Francis de Sales parishioners, the architect’s attempt to “sanctify the profane” only accomplished to profane the sacred.⁸² Additionally, in their publication compiled for the 100th anniversary of Saint Francis parish, there is no mention of the installation, or removal of the Venturi renovations, an indication of just how poorly they were received. Moreover, it is common practice for occasional reassignment of priests within dioceses, although, in light of the apparent conflicts between priests and parishioners there is no suggestion the transfer was met with much resistance by the parish.

⁸¹ Smyth, Henry J, Rev. "Letter to the Editor." Letter. 8 June 1970. Philadelphia Inquirer. Architectural Archives of the University of Pennsylvania. VSB 225.II.A.25.5

⁸² Von Moos, Stanislaus. Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown: Buildings and Projects. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1987. 301-02.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Throughout its history, the American Catholic Church has been at odds, in one form or another, with the Holy See. The philosophical ideas of Americanism and Modernism, coupled with the reforms instigated by the liturgical movement, were the ideological foundations that spurred the calling of the Council. Geographic distance only served to further the strain on Rome and Washington's relationship. What remains of the Catholic Church in America after the Second Vatican Council is an institution that partially updated its practices and buildings, and left in its wake a hodgepodge of architecture and practice that forms today's American Catholicism. In the 44 years since Council closed in 1965, American Catholics look beyond the Church for moral guidance and the center of community life; they have a more pluralistic view of the world than their pre-Vatican II counterparts, and embrace a variety of architectural styles and designs as their own. This plurality reflects the current state of Catholicism as much as traditional churches reflect the Catholics and the state of the faith practiced at the time of their construction.

The Catholic Church in America poses a unique challenge for those interested in preservation. From its floor plans to its decoration, the church building is the physical manifestation of the Catholic Faith. The changes in practice instituted by the Second Vatican Council are directly reflected in the alterations of traditional churches and in the design of post-Vatican II churches. For preservationists in America, protecting and preserving historic churches is complicated by the powerful link between building and belief, as well as the fundamental principle of separation of church and state. Legal

regulation can only go so far when dealing with historic American Catholic Churches, which is why values-centered preservation is such a powerful tool to protect churches and preserve the work of notable architects.

The impact of the Second Vatican Council on historic Catholic churches extends far beyond the immediate physical alteration when churches such as Saint Francis de Sales in West Philadelphia were renovated. Now almost 50 years from this landmark event, preservationists are in a position to look back at the renovations and not only understand the implications of the Council on historic churches, but also understand the lessons learned about the link between architecture and religion.

Some critics may say the damage has already been done to historic churches when the interiors were altered in the 1960's and 1970's, some may make a case for a renovation, like Robert Venturi's in 1968, the highest period of significance. However, through the lens of critical distance, preservationists and a values-centered management approach a management plan can forge a path that respects the pre-existing church, the renovations, and the wishes of the faith community that continues to use and maintain the buildings.

The case of Saint Francis de Sales poses an interesting challenge, one that might never have become an issue if the building committee took a cue from the Second Vatican Council and recognized the importance of parishioners taking an active role in the planning and renovating of their church. The irony cannot be lost that Father McNamee and Robert Venturi sought to follow the principles of active participation and modernization in design, but seemed blind to them in practice.

At this point in Saint Francis's history, the question becomes how should we treat the Venturi installation. Venturi only changed the inside of the church, the exterior largely remains the same, conveying the same feeling to the community at large. If preservation and the Catholic Church are to find common ground on interior architecture, the stakeholders must be grouped into two categories: the parishioners and the neighborhood community. This grouping also depends upon the definition of public and private space. In the case of Saint Francis de Sales, the public and private spaces are defined as the exterior and interior. However, this distinction may not always be the case, particularly with churches that are also prominent public spaces where the interiors are as easily recognizable as the exteriors and are iconic themselves, such as Saint Patrick's Cathedral in New York City, which includes altars designed by Tiffany & Co.

Defining who are the stakeholders is an area where preservationists can and should be included in the religious realm. The use of a values-based management operational plan would help resolve these situations. First, it must be determined where the value of the place is derived; does value lie in the notoriety of the architect who designed the building, in the location, in its role in a famous or important event, or simply because the building is church and possesses its own intrinsic value. Once the layers of meaning are discerned and the stakeholders are assigned priority, a preservation management plan can be developed.⁸³ Ultimately, it comes down to a decision of what is more important, preservation through the continuation of use by the community who built it, or the preservation of the integrity of original furnishings.

⁸³ Assigning priority to stakeholder groups is not always a popular, but often-necessary decision preservationists must make. Someone must be first among equals or the value of the building or landscape's original intention is in peril.

Religious buildings pose their own unique challenges and I suggest adopting a guiding principle of leaving the interior renovations to the users of the space and the exterior to the Preservationists. This idea is frequently followed when private buildings are renovated; a key question is “Does the street view reflect the original quality and context?” This is not a statement of blanket permission for projects frequently referred to as facadomies or facadectomis, rather it serves as another check and balance in the debate between who controls the preservation of private buildings, including churches.

The approach may lead to heart wrenching situations where a Robert Venturi interior is removed, but the building continues to serve as the community landmark with its golden dome rising above the trees in West Philadelphia, a symbol of permanence and tradition in a rapidly changing world. After all, “It is far better to realize the past has always been altered than to pretend it has always been the same.”⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Lowenthal, David. The Past is a Foreign Country. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. 412.

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